

The Need for Effective Leadership for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Divided Societies

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Abstract

South Sudan is the world's youngest nation born out of the conflict between the North and South. Once united in a common cause to form a state, however, the South Sudanese communities have entered into a renewed conflict and become divided communities. In 2013, South Sudanese leaders, Kiir and Riek, began an ethnic conflict. This paper will discuss the cause of the conflict and the role of leaders in fueling and solving the ethnic conflict and returning the nation to sustainable peace. The paper also highlights some of the main concerns in the renewed conflict in South Sudan and presents some recommendations for policy and practice that may be of interest to the current transitional government of national unity formed in February 2020. The IGAD and international community joined hands and launched a peace initiative that culminated in the round two of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018. The paper is arranged in the following order, introduction, theoretical framework, cause of conflict, and role of the leaders in fueling the conflict, solving the ethnic conflict, South Sudan's return to peace. The paper ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

Introduction

South Sudan had gone through a series of protracted civil wars between the north and the south from 1955 to 2005 that claimed over 2.5 million lives and displaced 4.5 million around the world. The struggle has culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, which later paved the way for the referendum, ultimately giving birth to an independent country. However, over 50 years of struggle brought social, cultural, economic, and political challenges. Following independence in 2011, the leadership has exploited social changes to advance its own tribal leadership along the ethnic lines.

To understand the issues confronting South Sudan's struggle for peace, and to get an insight as to the causes of the ethnic conflict, one needs to review its recent history. Some of the causes of the current conflict are a direct result of arbitrariness in decision making, which led to many problems for this fragile country. This notwithstanding, there is hope that peace and reconciliation may be achieved. Even in most conflict-filled countries, peace is achievable if all people strive to achieve peace. How it is done has been eluding many divided societies, as evidenced by the state of affairs in Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, and so on. This author contends that successful peacebuilding is done when approached both from the top-down and bottom-up. The people of South Sudan have already demonstrated that working together for a common cause of nationhood can be borne from the bottom up. The current challenge is to show that nationhood can be maintained from the top down.

Theoretical framework

Peacebuilding is a growing field that attracts many scholars who belong to different schools of thought whose perspectives may, therefore, be different. South Sudanese communities have survived various conflicts during the years of political struggle to gain an independent country. Paffenholz (2015) conceptualizes peacebuilding as training concepts to transform and empower the local communities, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992) described an *agenda for Peace* is placed on durable foundations to resolve conflict, and Issifu (2015a) identified the structural causes of conflict to promote sustainable peace and sustainable development. The theoretical framework from various scholars captured and explained the South Sudan ethnic conflicts. The peace reached by the warring parties requires to be sustained by them continuing to work together. However, implementing peacebuilding in the divided communities is an agenda of peace. By sustaining peace, the different societies will work towards development, which would prevent future conflict from reoccurring.

Implementing and sustaining peace will create opportunities among the communities, which will be a paradigm shift to ensure that “local communities” enjoy sustainable peace. Boutros Boutros-Ghali 1997 and 2015a, Issifu presented different perspectives. Boutros-Ghali narrated the importance of a "durable foundation to resolve conflict," while Issifu argued that "structural causes of conflict" aim at promoting sustainable peace and sustainable development.

South Sudan's ethnic conflict broke out in December 2013, between two opposing forces, one led by the President, Mr. Salva Kiir, and the other by the First Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar. During that conflict, this young country has experienced terrible atrocities committed against innocent people in particular children, women, and the elderly. A guerrilla movement turned into a political party that has lost its fundamental objectives of struggle as leaders introduced violence pitting communities against one another as a means to achieve their political ambitions. The government's role, *inter alia*, protecting, creating, and developing programs, has been replaced with open corruption, tribalism, cronyism, and nepotism to consolidate and maintain powers for two warring factions. This is made worse by the current institutions, skeletons lacking the necessary capacity to perform administrative functions. Having such a system is a threat to statehood's survivability and viability since there are no proper channels that deploy or recruit qualified personnel to run national institutions. These state institutions function like private enterprises, whereby one ethnic group occupies departmental positions because their associate or family member is in the position of authority. This is a potential source of divisions in a country that was forged on the basis of multiple ethnic entities.

The current peace agreement is on the verge of collapse even though it is the best option for the leaders to build confidence and return the country to normalcy: peace and development. The agreement's positive elements are a reform agenda to create a national army loyal to the country instead to the leaders, the building of infrastructure to accelerate development, address corruption through the rule of law, embarking on economic development, and ensuring security for all.

Cause of conflict

The conflict's cause was a political struggle for the leadership within the ruling party, the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM). It began in March of 2013 in the political bureau's meeting, which is the highest organ of the SPLM when some members of the bureau expressed their interests in leadership contests. That move by some to contest for top leadership positions angered President Kiir, the incumbent leader. As a result, in July 2013, he dissolved the entire elected government, which was done to eliminate the voices calling out for a change within the SPLM party. According to African Union Report, "on 23 July 2013, President dissolved the entire cabinet including the Vice President (with the exception of 4 ministers, who were spared for the President's own self-interest). In addition, he suspended the SPLM Secretary-General, Pagan Amum, for alleged corruption. The President also removed three elected state governors (Jonglei, Unity, and Lakes), promoting the Jonglei governor to the position of Minister of Defence while the other two were dropped" (AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 2015).

After the entire cabinet's dissolution, SPLM leadership was divided into two camps; President and Former Vice-President. This was so because they were running mates in the first South Sudan election in 2010, and in the SPLM party, they maintained a similar hierarchy. President Kiir has a constitutional prerogative to appoint and remove his cabinet but not the elected governors; Kiir had tampered with democratic core values and confirmed a dictatorial tendency. The two leaders dominated the SPLM hierarchy: number one was Kiir, a Dinka, and number two was Riek, a Nuer. These camps had begun mobilizing support among SPLM leaders that brewed the tension in the capital, Juba, and across South Sudan. On the evening of December 15, 2013, their respective bodyguards had begun shooting at each other, and from there, the fighting escalated to the whole city of Juba and the former greater Upper Nile regions.

According to the UN report, "the fighting in Greater Upper Nile continues to result in gross human rights violations and abuses, as well as serious violations of international humanitarian law (United Nations Human Rights, 2015, p. 11). The warring parties did not differentiate between the civilians and combatants, something that worsened the conditions on the ground. Similarly, Unity State in the same region has experienced the upsurge in fighting that was marked with what the United Nations Human Right reported as the “rampant killing, rape, abduction, looting, arson and displacement, but by a new brutality and intensity, including burning people inside their homes” (p. 11).

During the conflict, both parties went to war, resorting to targeted ethnic killings. Eventually, Former Vice-president then, Dr. Riek Machar, had to escape a political witch-hunt from Juba's capital to the border with Ethiopia to a place called Pagak, where he declared war on the government of President Kiir. On the night of fighting within Juba, the government alleged that the presidential guard was fighting a coup attempt and began arresting most former ministers who were relieved of their duties when the cabinet was dissolved in July 2013. President Kiir's government imprisoned 11 SPLM leaders and one house-arrest. At the same time, (IGAD) was reacting to the political unrest by convening, adopting, and appointing mediators to begin mediation to restore peace in South Sudan. Through this window of opportunity, Dr. Riek Machar put forth the condition that the SPLM leaders be released and transported to Addis Ababa for peace talks else he could not negotiate with the government. Among the political detainees, he had appointed the former Secretary-General of the SPLM, Mr. Pagan Amum, as a Chief Negotiator on his side; this resulted in increased pressure on Kiir from the regions and the international community.

President Kiir tried to address the pressure applied to his actions of arrests by releasing 7 out of 11 of those arrested. He handed them over to the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, something that many analysts referred to as "forced exile" but the remaining four were accused of treason and distortion, and they were thereby taken to the high court of South Sudan. In months of testimonies and deliberations, they were acquitted by the court of law and released to the President of Kenya to join their colleagues. Jok et al., 2014 argue that "after several months in detention, the government of South Sudan has decided to stay the charges of treason that were brought against four prominent South Sudanese politicians in relation to the government's allegation that they had been part of a plot to overthrow the government of President SalvaKiir. (p. 2). A total of eleven politicians were accused and arrested in December 2013 and after the regional and international pressures on the government 7 of those imprisoned were released on bail late January, while the remaining four were set free on April 27, 2014, a hundred and forty-five days since they were arrested in December 2013" (p. 2).

Clearly, the South Sudan judges that tried four political detainees have set an excellent example by standing their ground of legality, impartiality, and integrity in a toxic political environment where the rule of law is manipulated or ignored by the ruling class. They took the risk of telling the truth and defending the constitution through a thorough and open investigation that defused a fabricated political witch-hunt in an attempt to eliminate political opponents. The government of President Kiir was confronted with the lack of credible evidence to convict political detainees resulting in dropped charges. Jok et al.(2014) argue that "the government has been losing traction in attempts to sustain the burden of proving an act of coup plot" (p. 2).

Since the detainees were senior members of the SPLM, they were requested to play a role in peace negotiations. However, unsurprisingly, upon reaching Addis Ababa, they had created a third block called "Former Political Detainees" (FPD). Thus, the FPD was composed of those who were accused by the government of working with Former Vice President then, Dr. Riek Machar to carry out an alleged coup. The rationale for the former political detainees creating the third block was that they did not want to join the two warring parties that have since been engaged in killing South Sudanese. In the IGAD-plus peace agreement, FPD ended up becoming a neutral party as peace partners with the government and opposition. In the author's view, former political detainees' middle ground has yielded nothing than prolonging a crisis. Solving this systemic problem required ceasing psychological warfare, especially when symptoms are awaiting real diagnoses, rather than a 'deliberate perception.'

When leaders are not at peace, their followers are not at peace either. Moreover, South Sudan has not come to grips with its poverty and economy. In the above scenario, attempts at peacebuilding and reconciliation in the divided society of South Sudan reflects the country's dire socioeconomic situation. Pankhurst (1999) notes that "reconciliation between communities, or sides in the conflict, can also be strongly affected by the political and economic conditions of the country, once a negative peace is established" (p. 247). Essentially, this is what has been going in South Sudan where the economy is in shambles, and the political machinery is moribund.

Role of the leaders in fueling the conflict

The leaders (Kiir and Riek) had, directly and indirectly, fueled the conflict throughout their leadership roles, especially in their "us" versus "them" attitude. This has further divided the country and reinforced the strong loyalty of their tribal constituencies of Dinka and Nuer. Since then, the country has been run on presidential decrees instead of the national constitution that stipulates the duties of national institutions and those empowered to hold up the constitution.

The primary role of a sovereign state is to uphold and honor the principles of their constitution by providing security to the people and their property instead of killing and displacing citizens that make up the nation. The importance of peacebuilding and reconciliation was acknowledged in the CPA that concluded Africa's longest civil war in 2005. The peace brokers of 2005 were aware of post-conflict issues surrounding atrocities committed during the war, which required communities to reconcile by coming together and forgiving each other to move forward cohesively as an independent country. Thus, before the current conflict started, the current First Vice President, Dr. Machar, was tasked to organize a peace conference in April 2013 that was later on politicized, polarized, and eventually canceled under a presidential decree.

Many international organizations have expressed grave concern about the humanitarian crises and crimes against humanity committed by both sides in the war. The lack of proactive leadership has compromised peacebuilding and reconciliation in the divided communities of South Sudan. Arguably, it will take generations to overcome the division due to the culture of 'tribal constituency' among the leaders that represent those divided communities. Lerche(2000) maintains that:

"rather than requiring forgiveness, at the collective level reconciliation should create cultural "space" where legitimacy is accorded to all these reactions, where people are encouraged to forgive but also allowed to find other ways of dealing with their sorrow, anger, and resentment if they are not willing to forgive. Also, though the government may wish to move the society away from "ethnicism" or "racialism" to "national unity," this cannot be imposed. People may first need to reaffirm their sense of communal identity when this identity has been threatened and denied, and reconciliation should accommodate this as well" (p. 68).

The ongoing competition between the ethnic groups has created unfavorable conditions, which have increased the levels of frustration. Effective leadership will be required to address the current levels of frustration adequately. This is necessary if the country rebuilds the social fabric of the divided communities through the implementation of peace-building programs. In addition, it will enhance socioeconomic development.

Currently, leaders, Kiir and Riek, are still maintaining their "tribal constituencies" (Dinka and Nuer), who are hell-bent on destabilizing the current peace agreement that formed the basis of the Transitional Government of National Unity (IGNU). UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2016 argue that:

"sexual violence continued after the initial fighting subsided, and over 100 women and girls are reported to have been raped or gang-raped on the road leading out of Juba towards Yei. On 18 July, for example, 35 women and girls were reportedly raped in two separate incidents: firstly, 28 women, including 12 minors, were allegedly assaulted at an SPLA checkpoint at the Jebel Junction on the Yei Road; and in the second incidence that day, seven other women were reportedly raped on the road between two Protection of Civilians sites, where UNMISS peacekeepers protect people – mostly Nuer — displaced by earlier rounds of fighting."

Solving the ethnic conflict

In 2013, when war broke out between the two camps, the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) bloc had wasted no time in trying to get the situation under control. It initiated peace talks between the SPLM-in government and SPLM-in opposition in Ethiopia's capital. It took two years and a half to ink the first Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCRSS). However, by then hundreds of thousands of innocent lives had already been lost and millions displaced into neighboring countries: According to UN Secretary-General, 2016, reported that:

"before violence broke out in July 2016, some 6.1 million people – half of the population – were estimated to need urgent humanitarian assistance. More than 2.3 million people have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, including more than 1.6 million displaced internally. More than 900,000 have fled to neighboring countries, and 4.8 million people across the country are reportedly facing severe food insecurity and 250,000 children severely malnourished as war-hit."

The IGAD and other organizations had pressured the warring parties to prioritize peace in the interest of innocent people. On August 17, 2015, a deal was reached and signed partly by SPLM –IO, SPLM-FDPs, and other political parties. On the government side, President Kiir refused to sign citing certain reservations in the accord. Through mounting pressure by IGAD, AU, Troika, and the international community, President Kiir eventually did sign the IGAD-plus accord. The signing of the peace accord began the process of transporting 1,300 opposition forces as per ARCRSS, as a security measure, to South Sudan's capital, Juba.

On April 26, 2016, Dr. Riek Machar, now the leader of the SPLM – In Opposition (IO), went to Juba and took an oath of the office as the First Vice President appoints ministers into the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU). On April 28, 2016, the peace partners hoped to restore peace and stability formed the South Sudan Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU). However, the TGNU was symbolic in nature because the leaders still disagreed on many outstanding issues such as the 28 states not part of peace deal, cantonnement of IO forces in areas agreed to, and the demilitarization of Juba as per the security agreement, and more.

Mistrust developed, and tensions arose once more. It was reported that: On July 7, 2016, that “President Kiir’s military intelligence and national security personnel killed Opposition’s Lt. Colonel George Alex Gismala, and took his body to their military barracks. Opposition’s soldiers were fired at, resulting in the initial clash that saw the death of five soldiers on Gudele road. On Friday, July 8, 2016, the First Vice President, Dr. Machar, and President Kiir met in Presidential Palace, where deadly incidences took place between their bodyguards. On July 9-10, fighting continued to July 11, and Dr. Machar and his forces were dislodged from their base; and he relocated outside Juba" (Dak, 2016).

Dr. Riek Machar demanded that a third party of forces is deployed in Juba to create a buffer zone. The IGAD, the AU, the UN Security Council all supported and adopted this during the African Union summit in Kigali, Rwanda. Despite that, the government has refused to allow the deployment of more troops. The government blamed the SPLM in opposition for starting a war in Juba, according to its letter addressed to the IGAD-plus nations that brokered the peace. Lerche (2000) argues that "reconciliation must be proactive in seeking to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationship and share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences, to create new perceptions and a new shared experiences" (p. 62). Currently, there is neither a focus on relationships nor a sharing of perception between the warring factions in South Sudan. On August 5, 2016, the IGAD countries met in Ethiopia and agreed that protection forces would be sent to South Sudan to protect civilians, foreign diplomats, and government institutions. That agreement was echoed by the US and UN Security Council that approved 4000 protection forces to deploy in South Sudan capital to protect civilians and save the peace agreement. The UN Security Council, AU & IGAD maintained that;

“adopting resolution 2304 (2016) by 11 votes in favor to none against, with four abstentions (China, Egypt, Russian Federation, Venezuela), the 15-member Council demanded that all parties immediately put an end to the fighting and that the leaders implement the permanent ceasefire declared in the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. Condemning in the strongest terms the recent fighting in Juba, the Council further demanded that the Transitional Government of National Unity comply with its international obligations and immediately cease obstructing UNMISS and other humanitarian actors in performing their mandates. It requested that the Secretary-General identify options to enhance the safety and security of Mission personnel” (UN Security Council Resolution: 2304, 2016).

South Sudan’s return to peace

Returning to an atmosphere of peace is a confidence builder for peace partners to implement peace agreements in letter and spirit. This is the only way forward for maintaining peace and security. After that, other measures such as the development of essential services such as healthcare, education, food security, and infrastructural development can follow. It requires peace partners to reopen a new page of unity and be strong enough to confront the country's political and economic challenges. Cooperation will allow the Joint Monitoring Evaluation Commission (JMEC), which reports to IGAD, the AU, Troika countries, and the UN Security Council, to approach donors to speed up the process of securing funds to accelerate implementation.

Positive engagement will prevent full-scale from returning to war and reduce suffering for innocent civilians. John Prendergast maintains that “a return to deadly conflict is likely unless the economic and atrocity crimes at the root of the country's violent kleptocratic system are addressed. To address root causes, effectively, accountable institutions in South Sudan have to be built, and a safe space has to be ensured for civil society and the media to perform their critical functions" (Prendergast, 2016)

It is obvious that the leaders are not committed to peace, and communities remain divided along tribal lines. Therefore, returning to war is imminent, although it is an opportunity for peace partners to unite and show leadership. Additionally, civic education should be introduced to open up communication lines, which will create room for working together to help return the country to peace.

Embarking on the journey of peace will guarantee security and safety. Moreover, it will create an atmosphere of engagement on national policies and programs aimed at changing citizens' perceptions and opening a new chapter in the history of the world's newest nation.

The return to peace means implementing the peace agreement in action. It means addressing compounded issues that fueled the conflict. Prendergast (Ibid) maintains that "unchecked greed is the main conflict driver in South Sudan although politicians have mobilized armed elements based on ethnicity, leading to horrific war crimes which make peace and reconciliation all the more difficult" (p. 1). In returning to peace within the country, the ruling party must revisit the core values it held during the liberation struggle. A nation wrested and founded on strong values of progress, equality, dignity, freedom of expression, the rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of association, of religion, doctrines of liberalism and pluralism. Currently, all these values have been eroded, and the state has stumbled down the wrong path due to its own leadership crises.

South Sudan, as a nation, fought on the unity, equality, equity, and the resolve of the 64 ethnicities with over 300 dialectic languages. During Africa's longest civil war, these communities united and fought to overcome the Khartoum oppression by defending their unity and oneness in defeating what they considered to be their common enemy, the regime in Khartoum.

Conclusions

The paper has demonstrated why South Sudan needs effective leadership to implement peacebuilding and reconciliation to be able to enhance socioeconomic development. It took over 60 years of cooperation and struggled for 64 different ethnic groups to fight the corrupt Khartoum regime to achieve independence and, indeed, new nationhood. Quite an achievement! It would indeed be a sad day to see that all this was in vain; all South Sudanese should be reminded of this. South Sudan is a country, and undeniably it will remain a country forever! At the same time, it seems that a lot of the average citizens have not improved, as many have died, and even more have been displaced. These questions remain: can nationhood be salvaged? Can South Sudan become a prosperous nation for all its citizens, given the current crisis? As we have seen, some elements in place could make this happen. Somewhat surprisingly, the judiciary held its ground in a trial of 4 political detainees; the peace partners are in place, and even the warring leaders have capitulated on occasion. The people of South Sudan demonstrated once that all obstacles could be overcome; governance crises, insecurity, healthcare, education, infrastructures, peacebuilding, and reconciliation can be achieved. It can be done again from the bottom-up approach. It is up to the leaders to ensure that all ingredients are put in place from the top down.

Recommendations

A). Peacebuilding and reconciliation in divided societies is a rebuilding process of repairing the damaged relations in the years of struggle aimed at gaining independence and nationhood. Furthermore, it is a process of acknowledging the wrongs or atrocities committed individually and communally. In January 2013, the author of this article wrote an open letter to the current First Vice-president, Dr. Riek Machar ***titled "Start Peace and Reconciliation at the Grassroots levels"*** for the peace and reconciliation conference that was scheduled to take place on **April 18-21, 2013** in South Sudan capital, Juba. In that letter, three stages were envisioned. A snapshot of the letter is being placed in the conclusion and recommendation section of this paper because it provides some of the recommendations to be considered in the peacebuilding efforts of South Sudan.

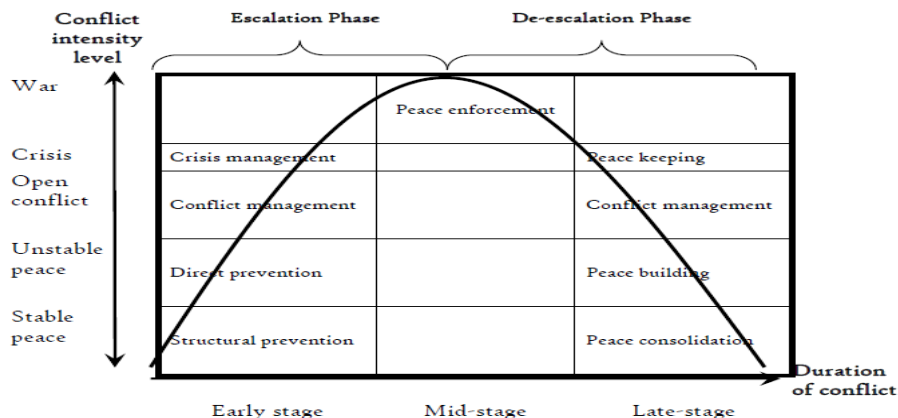
1. Peace and reconciliation in divided communities should take place in rural areas where the problems are occurring. It would allow participants' discussions to be more engaging and inspiring, which will ultimately enable them to reconcile with each other at a grassroots level. This will enable them to express their feelings nearby where the message of peace will be articulated and contextualized. Having conferences at the county level will reenergize and regenerate feelings of forgiveness from affected individuals and communities to accept realities and begin new lives within a new nation. If peace and reconciliation were to commence at grassroots levels, questions could be posed, such as; what can be done to let warring communities abandon their past and begin the future? What can be done to prevent future atrocities from being committed against innocent people? The affected districts can answer these questions and many others reciprocally, which can give peace and reconciliation a vital meaning. Convening peace and reconciliation at the national level will make us miss the target or opportunity of engaging the right audiences. It would be more appropriate to let the affected communities take ownership of their peace and reconciliation. A meaningful peace and reconciliation will come when involved parties are dialoguing, communicating, and engaging one-on-one discussions with language flexibility. Dr. Machar should realize that peace and reconciliation in our country are most needed and that healing those wounds will not be healed in days, weeks, months, but years.

2. Peace and reconciliation could occur at the state level where Counties' (rural areas) resolutions will be studied and scrutinized before they are made into laws or practical policies. It can help each state government to utilize Counties' recommendations to prioritize service deliveries proactively. This approach can task each government to shoulder essential responsibilities as preventative measures of restoring peace at grassroots communities where the problems are occurring daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. The state government can take ownership of identifying the challenges and turn those challenges into opportunities such as health care, education, creating employment through private enterprises, address insecurity and encourage subsistence agriculture to address the disparities.

3. Peace and reconciliation at the federal level in a similar way as to what scheduled on April 18-21, 2013 where special guests were drawn nationally, regionally and internationally, which will deliberate on grassroots' recommendations gained from stage one and two at the counties (rural areas) and states' levels. Undertaking the bottom-up approach theory would allow engagement and shared responsibilities across the board. Affected communities will take custody of agreed-upon resolutions, rather than viewed as being passed down by the central government.

The above three stages conceptualized to reflect model 2 of Michael Lund, 1996, presented in the diagram below. The conflict intensity level is “crisis open conflict, unstable peace and stable peace.” The two levels, crisis open conflict and unstable peace represent where South Sudan currently is. Based on Michael Lund’s model 2, 1996, the conflict intensity level also generates “escalation and de-escalation phases, which explain the sharp curve that runs from “structural prevention” to “peace consolidation.” South Sudan’s conflict has gone through the intensive conflict stage which requires peace keeping before any peacebuilding can take root in a nation born out of conflict. Implementing “peace enforcement” is a mutual transformational stage reached by warring parties with the help of third parties. This is referred to as peace enforcement in the diagram. The result is sustainable peace leading to sustainable development.

Model 2: The Conflict Cycle



* Model based on Michael Lund, 1996

B). The South Sudan Truth & Reconciliation Commission (SSTRC) is called upon to be an independent body established to address mistrusts by reinitiating a path to peacebuilding, reconciliation, and healing. This requires establishing a rational and peaceful environment. There should be a branch of the SSTRC at all levels of governments ranging from County, State, and Central government.

C). South Sudan should address the following socio-economic and political challenges facing the divided communities for peacebuilding to prevail:

1. **Crippled economy:** South Sudanese are now struggling on a daily basis to make ends meet due to war and global macroeconomic situation that caused the fall in oil prices and increased essential commodities as the dollar's value has tremendously increased compared to the value of South Sudanese Pound (SSP). For example, \$100 US dollar is closer to 40,000 SSP in the bank while in the black market is closer to 50,000 SSP. Owing to the above scenarios, the economic circumstances shall be treated as equal priorities as peacebuilding and reconciliation in South Sudan. This is because the current economic turbulence has already fueled hunger accompanied by hate and mistrust among the divided communities of South Sudan.

Therefore, rebuilding peace and reconciliation should encompass economic progress to eliminate extreme poverty, promote dignity and unity of living, and not die with hunger.

2. **Insecurity:** Insecurity affects economic stability and social mobility. It prevents local economic activities such as subsistence farming, hunting, and gathering, from lawful communities. South Sudan's economy has suffered severely because of reduced oil production, while insecurity has scared potential investors to invest in various economic sectors that would recreate missing opportunities. Securing an environment, which ensures mutual interest, requires peacebuilding and reconciliation.

3. **Spiraling corruption:** Robbing public resources and investing them outside South Sudan is a social crime. Having a nation means strengthening institutions in order to promote and safeguard citizens' interests, not only the interests of the leaders. South Sudan's corruption is known globally: the young nation has lost 4 billion dollars through corrupt officials. Being an oil-rich country has not been of benefit to the majority of the people. Having a nation engaged in looting of their resources means nothing but the absence of peacebuilding and reconciliation among civilians who are now trapped in extreme and absolute poverty because of spiraling corruption.

4. **Displaced civilians:** the displacement of civilians internally (UNMISS) and externally to neighboring countries has defeated the hard-won sovereign state's promise. Displacing and keeping vulnerable people, especially children in the UNMISS compound for up to 7 years without schooling, is a human right abuse. Chowdhury et al. (2013) maintain "education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights."

5. **Lack of good governance:** South Sudan is floating like an object on water following the waves, if not the winds. There are no checks and balances. It is very difficult to know what is in the national interest and what is not. Crises are everywhere; in the banking systems, security sectors, social services if there are any. Border and other unfinished issues of national interests are all forgotten.

6. **Food Security:** A nation solely dependent on importing food from neighboring countries and UN food rations will not meet food security standards. Addressing food security will reduce insecurity, particularly to the communities that prioritize cattle rustling as sources of food and wealth accumulation. Above all, it will foster peaceful coexistence among divided communities, which is the sine qua non of peacebuilding and reconciliation in South Sudan. Moreover, access to adequate nourishment is a human right.

7. **Collapsing of the country:** Countries collapse when leaders are not able to protect their own citizens, control their own economy, and patrol their borders and airspace. In South Sudan, it has become evident that towns are crowded because of insecurity in rural areas (some parts), which forces rural communities to abandon their localities and sources of livelihoods and come to cities. They become victims of hunger because the government is unable to provide for its citizens. Not implementing peace agreement in full means switching off bilateral and multilateral ties with regional and international partners who brokered and supported the peace agreement. The way forward is through building trust and peace among the divided communities.

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Author's Biographical Note

David Mabior Atem has joined the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, graduate program at The University of Manitoba in September 2016. He is a recognized educator in the affairs of South Sudan, in areas of peacebuilding through institutional development, social justice, community economic development, reconciliation, human rights, and state-building. He holds a BA in International Affairs Studies and an Advanced Certification in Public Policy and Administration from the University of Winnipeg. South Sudanese-Canadian and the former unaccompanied minor who endured a journey of migration, loss, and eventual resettlement in Canada. Now his advocacy for youths is unparalleled, developing a transformative model – **IDEAS (Involve, Discover, Engage, and Achieve Successes)**. **His current research has also developed a transformative model of development - SIRSS (Strategic Planning, Innovative Thinking, and Reliable Information/Data & Sustainable Solution)**. He is the Founder and Chair of the Dialogue on South Sudan and Sudan Forum in Canada and Panelist for the Prairie Research Associates (PRA). Dialogue on South Sudan and Sudan is a forum driven by impartiality and inclusivity with open membership regardless of gender and group affiliation to embrace trusting-building and peacebuilding to discourage divisive sentiments.

He has written over 35 opinion articles on various topics, including open letters and policy paper titled ***Tapping and Connecting South Sudanese Diaspora to their home country*** to champion the country's post-conflict reconstruction development. He has also written academic articles that are published in the various Social Science Journals; Journal of Social Science for Policy Implication; ***Understanding the UN Agenda of Youths 2030: Working with and for Young People to support the empowerment, engagement, and participation of young people in disarmament is the right call!***, Journal of Economic and Development; ***Unthinkable Journeys: Sub-Saharan Africa Involuntary Youth Migration*** and Journal of Global Peace and Conflict; ***The Need for Effective Leadership for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Divided Societies***

He is also a big believer in community power, of which some prominent leaders and elders have referred to him as a change maker. To put it into perspective, in his acceptance speech for the Marsha Hanen Award for Excellence in Creating Community Awareness that he received in the fall convocation of (2014), he referred to a community as a "human bank," where citizens live and grow, where students who become doctors, engineers, dentists, leaders, peacemakers, teachers, dentists, and so on, come from. He encourages students to be part of their surrounding environment, whether on campus or in the community. This will enhance their understanding and networking. As an educator and community builder, he was also awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award (2017) for his excellent contributions in the education system.

Other Notable Accomplishments

Before migrating to Canada, Atem worked extensively and successfully for various international organizations. One of these was the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Kakuma, Kenya, a vast and popular refugee camp, from **1995-1997**. He was tasked with needs assessments, encompassing assessing, managing, directing, prioritizing, and ensuring distribution of non-food items in the refugee camp. Atem was also employed at the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in Kakuma, Kenya, from **1998-2001**, Department of Case Management (Case Worker) partly funded and administered by the UNHCR Community Services. He held distinctive responsibilities for managing strategic and durable solutions (resettlement) in the camp that hosted more than **120,000** refugees from seven countries: Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan. In this capacity, he helped to devise, roll out and manage a durable solution in general and specifically for an unaccompanied minor group known today around the world as the Lost Boys and Girls of South Sudan/Sudan. One of his other core responsibilities was to receive and provide tour guides to visitors from different organizations that were sponsoring the Lost Boys & Girls of South Sudan/Sudan to the United States of America from **1998-2001**. In these roles, he achieved strong reference letters when departing.

He is a member of Winnipeg Rotary, serving under the world service committee. He and other committee members were to go to South Sudan for educational assessment in December, 2013 or March 2014, but both trips were postponed due to political instability. However, he has adapted and applied the philosophy of ***“Learn to Change the World”*** as a motto of day-to-day principle. This means learning and generating a plethora of authentic ideas and, for the most part, he takes necessary actions to implement them.

David Mabior Atem's biographical note presents a highly distinctive and distinguished profile drawn from the diverse expertise, in the community services, humanitarian development, peacebuilding, reconciliation, administration, policy development, community economic development, and academic scholarships.